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Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7524th meeting
Wednesday, 16 September 2015, 11 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Churkin	(Russian Federation)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Mahamat Zene
	Chile	Mr. Olguín Cigarroa
	China	Mr. Liu Jieyi
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mr. Hmoud
	Lithuania	Ms. Murmokaitė
	Malaysia	Mr. Ibrahim
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mrs. Ogwu
	Spain	Mr. Oyarzun Marchesi
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Ms. Sison
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/698)

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The meeting was called to order at 11 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East

Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014) (S/2015/698)

The President (*spoke in Russian*): In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Stephen O'Brien, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of Syria to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2015/698, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014).

I now give the floor to Mr. O'Brien.

Mr. O'Brien: The recent images of the 3-year-old boy Aylan Kurdi lying lifeless on a beach in Turkey encapsulate the profound and prolonged desperation of the Syrian people, too long exposed to the horrors of a brutal and savage conflict. I recount the words of Abdullah Kurdi, Aylan's father, who said, "I tried to catch my children and wife, but there was no hope. One by one they died." Tragically, far too many Syrian families have spoken similar words over the last five years. It is civilians who continue to bear the brunt of this war.

As the plight of Syrian refugees desperately trying to reach Europe in recent weeks has shown, the effects of the Syria crisis are not just national or regional, but global in nature. The conflict in Syria has propelled one of the largest refugee exodus since the Second World War. These refugees are fleeing for their lives from war and violence, and have a right to seek asylum without any form of discrimination. As an international community, it is our responsibility to support the neighbouring countries that shoulder most of the burden. At the same time, stronger efforts must be made to address the root causes that force people to leave their homes and seek asylum abroad — addressing the flee-or-die response natural to each and everyone of us faced with peril or a challenge to our survival. For Syria, it should be clear to all that this means a political settlement that brings about an end to the crisis.

In the absence of such a political solution, the Security Council adopted resolution 2139 (2014) in February, which demands action by the parties in a number of areas, including an end to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure and facilitating unhindered humanitarian access. I deeply regret to inform the Council that, some 18 months later, the Council's strong demands continue to go unheeded. By any measure, human suffering in Syria has worsened, not diminished.

Over the past month, violence has continued throughout the country. There has been no reduction in the appalling patterns of violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. Indiscriminate attacks, including with explosive weapons, continue to cause widespread death and destruction. For example, between 17 and 26 August, Government forces repeatedly attacked residential areas in Douma, in rural Damascus, killing at least 90 civilians and wounding nearly 300 more. Meanwhile, in the last week of August, non-State armed groups launched hundreds of shells on civilian-populated areas of Damascus and rural Damascus, killing at least 20 civilians and injuring many more, while yesterday, shelling by non-State armed groups on civilian populated areas of Aleppo killed at least 33 people, including women and children, and injured over 150 more people.

Allegations of attacks with chemical agents continue to be received. The joint mechanism of the United Nations and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons established by resolution 2235 (2015) is the relevant body to investigate those allegations.

The deliberate targeting of civilian infrastructure continues to occur with alarming frequency. Attacks by non-State armed groups have resulted in significant disruption to municipal water and electricity networks in Aleppo, Damascus and in Dar'a over the past weeks and months. Most recently, approximately 2 million people went without water in Aleppo city for two

weeks in August. Deliberately depriving families and communities of water and electricity only serves to worsen humanitarian conditions and drive ordinary Syrians into greater despair and desperation.

Hospitals and medical facilities continue to be attacked. In August, Physicians for Human Rights documented 12 attacks on medical facilities, while 15 medical workers were killed. Since the start of 2014, there have been 169 attacks on medical facilities and 252 medical workers have been killed. Attacks on such facilities have had a multiplier effect, not only killing and injuring, but also destroying the health-care system as a whole, leaving many Syrians unable to obtain the most basic levels of care.

Schools, which should be safe places for children to learn and grow in, continue to be attacked. Since the start of 2014, the United Nations has verified at least 84 attacks on or near schools, although the actual number of schools attacked is likely higher. One in four schools cannot be used because it has been damaged or destroyed, or is being used as a shelter for the internally displaced or for military purposes. Deliberate attacks on hospitals and schools are war crimes. All parties will unquestionably be held to account now and however far into the future it takes after investigation and due judicial process.

I have spoken before about the impact of the conflict on Syria's children and young people, but it bears repeating once again. Today, Syria is one of the most dangerous places on Earth to be a child. Over 5.6 million children are in need of immediate assistance. Although the school year commenced this past week, over 2 million children — one out of every three — are not in school in Syria, and an additional 450,000 children are at risk of dropping out. We are extremely concerned about hundreds of thousands of children in areas controlled by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), forced to follow a curriculum designed by the designated terrorist group. According to reports of the Commission of Inquiry and others, children are murdered, tortured and subjected to sexual violence by all parties to the conflict. Millions of children have been traumatized by the horrors they have witnessed. Young people have few prospects. The conflict is not only destroying Syria's present, but it is also destroying its future. One missing cohort of educated young people will soon become two cohorts.

Despite the volatile and insecure environment, the United Nations and non-governmental organization partners continue to deliver life-saving assistance to millions of people in need. In the past month alone, 4.2 million people received food aid, medicines and supplies for 1.1 million treatments were dispatched, and nearly 450,000 received relief items and other support. We should all recognize the commitment and bravery of the thousands of workers who deliver much-needed aid at great personal risk, particularly the Syrian organizations and volunteers who are often the first responders on the front lines.

While we are reaching a significant number of people, we are still unable to deliver sufficient quantities of aid to people in the hardest-to-reach areas. Fighting and insecurity hamper our ability to respond. For example, during August, the World Food Programme was unable to reach over 1 million people in rural Damascus, rural Homs and rural Hama. A further 750,000 people in ISIL-controlled areas cannot be reached with food due to safety concerns.

In addition to insecurity, the parties to the conflict continue to place restrictions that limit or obstruct where, to whom and how often we deliver assistance. Some 422,000 people continue to live under the most intolerable siege conditions, unable to leave their communities, and we are largely unable to get in to deliver much needed humanitarian assistance. Over the past three months, only 9 per cent of people in besieged areas have received much-needed health assistance from the United Nations per month, while no food or other basic relief supplies have entered these areas despite the overwhelming need.

Approval for 46 requests for inter-agency convoys remains pending with the Government of Syria. If approved, the United Nations could reach an additional 1.2 million people in desperate need of assistance. Meanwhile, Government-approved convoys to Nubul, Zahra, Afrin in Aleppo and to Foah and Kefrayah in Idlib have been stalled by the lack of approval by non-State armed groups for safe passage. There can be no justification for deliberately obstructing humanitarian access and depriving civilians of access to services essential to their survival.

On a more positive note, I welcome the recent progress made in August on visas, with the Government of Syria granting of 109 visas for United Nations staff members from 12 different offices. Some 96 per cent of the visa applications submitted in August were approved during the same month. I very much hope that

this trend will continue, not only with visas, but also for other administrative obstacles.

The lack of funding for humanitarian operations continues to be a major challenge. We require some $738 million to fund essential life-saving operations until the end of this calendar year in Syria. I appreciate the generosity of donors in 2015 already, and ask them to consider making additional pledges given the extraordinary level of need we are facing.

We are running out of words to describe the utter disregard for human life and dignity that has become the hallmark of this crisis. Every day that passes, more Syrian children, women and men die. Millions more are forced to live in appalling conditions where there is no safe refuge in their country, where their basic needs for protection are unmet, where their fundamental rights are trampled upon, and where their futures and that of their country appear increasingly bleak.

While the parties to this conflict are responsible for upholding their obligations under international law, the members of the Security Council and other Member States with influence can and must do more to demand that the indiscriminate violence stop, that sieges be lifted, that civilian infrastructure be respected, and that vital humanitarian assistance reach all areas of the country without delay.

But above all else, the Council must focus its efforts on finding a political solution. I call again on members of the Council to set aside their differences and work together to finally bring an end to this nightmare for the Syrian people. As bestowed by the Charter of the United Nations, the Security Council has an inescapable responsibility to help the Syrian people realize a future of peace. I very much hope that, for the sake of the people of Syria, a political solution will be found as soon as possible.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I thank Mr. O'Brien for his briefing.

I give the floor to the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like to thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Stephen O'Brien, for his briefing to the Security Council. I should like to share with the Council my views regarding certain significant aspects of that very important briefing.

First, Mr. O'Brien was right to say that the root causes of the Syrian crisis must be addressed. Naturally, they are political and not humanitarian in nature. I will therefore proceed on the basis of that understanding. It is not my intention to criticize the report of the Secretary-General (S/2015/698) or to comment on the Under-Secretary-General's statement; rather, I wish to clarify the overall scenario that underlies the humanitarian situation in my country, Syria.

As members are aware, the Security Council has adopted a series of important resolutions to combat terrorism. To its credit, two days ago the Russian presidency of the Security Council organized an important event on the ocassion of the tenth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1624 (2005). That resolution was followed by resolutions 1989 (2011) and 2199 (2015). While all of them prohibit inciting, funding or supporting terrorism, above all they make it mandatory on States Members of the United Nations not to adopt terrorism as a policy to pressure the Governments of other States. That is splendid as a pronouncement, but it is not applied at all in practical terms.

There are illegal armed terrorist groups operating in northern Syria, such as Jaish Al-Fatha, which is financed by Turkey and Qatar. This group daily fires thousands of shells against our people in Aleppo, killing hundreds and injuring thousands and preventing normal life. Another so-called army is operating in the south, this one funded by Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the latter being a member of the Council and a brother country of Syria. That army carries out the same dirty terrorist tactics in targeting our people in the south. And then there is another such army in the town of Duma, a suburb of Damascus, to which Mr. O'Brien referred. That group, which calls itself Jaish Al-Islam, is funded by Saudi Arabia. I have thus, in a single minute, referred to three "armies" of terrorists — one working under Turkey's command, another under Jordan's and yet a third under Saudi Arabia and Qatar's command.

Unfortunately, the report of the Secretary-General refers to those terrorist groups as non-State armed groups, not terrorist groups. As the Council is aware, this is a neutral phrase that is completely out of line with Council provisions on combating terrorism. The question is therefore eminently political in nature. That, in turn, has led to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation and led, in part, to the refugee exodus to which Mr. O'Brien referred. That is now the main preoccupation of world public opinion and

of international media. My people's tragedy is a major tragedy. Unfortunately, thus far, here in the Council we have not yet touched upon the real reason for segments of the Syrian people leaving their country by force. Terrorism is the main reason that the masses of Syrians fleeing their country.

Terrorism first, but then the coercive and misnamed so-called "economic sanctions" imposed on the Syrian people. They, too, are a major factor in paralysing economic activity and destroying our infrastructure, including the shuttering of hundreds, if not thousands, of factories, destroying employment opportunities and increasing unemployment.

The third reason for the crisis in my country is the huge wave of terrorists and mercenaries being sent to Syria from all over the world — from 100 States Members of the Organization, including Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Libya, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. This information is from a Council report. Those thousands of terrorists are destroying archeological sites in Syria and Iraq, killing and kidnapping women, smuggling archeological artefacts as well as oil and gas through Turkish brokers to the European Union. That funds terrorism. Syrian antiquities are being sold at auction in London. How did they get there?

The image of the child Aylan Turki has rendered a great service to the Syrian people, as it served to highlight certain aspects not being addressed by the media, politicians or diplomats. Why are children not going to school? Well, the reason is now clear: they do not go because terrorists control a vast region, where schools are located. They prevent chilren from attending, while also developing terrorist curriculums inspired by Saudi and Gulf State curriculums in order to teach our children about beheading and hatred for other religions, as well as hatred of all those with different views.

Did the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) spring from a vacuum? No, there are those who have sponsored, helped, funded and facilitated ISIS and its smuggling of oil, gas and antiquities out of Syria. But some still persist in their circular logic, concerned only about slandering the Syrian Government, its President and its army — to the extent that one representative called for an Arria Formula meeting to talk about two gay people, a Syrian and an Iraqi, as if that were the concern of the Council instead of resolving the Syrian crisis politically in a Syrian-led process without external interference and in accordance with the Council's own resolutions.

Today I sent a series of letters to the President of the Council. The first entails a reply by the Syrian Government to the nineteenth report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), which is before the Council today. I also sent another set of letters on the number of victims in Aleppo and Damascus caused by shelling by what the Secretary-General refers to as non-State armed groups — the terrorist "armies" funded by Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Jordan. There have been hundreds of victims in those two cities, and they are mentioned by name.

We have brought all of this to the Council's attention over the past few years. This scenario is still unfolding, although some ignore it and are still referring to these terrorists as non-State armed groups. Why is it only in Syria that they are referred to this way? Why is it only in Syria and Iraq that terrorists are called non-State actors? A terrorist in the United States is called a terrorist. If a terrorist appears in France, Spain, Belgium or Britain, he is called a terrorist. Why is he not called a terrorist in Syria? This is a cover-up. Why are his actions justified in this way? Why are such terrorists called non-State armed groups? Syria's Government is a legitimate Government whose duty is to protect its people, implement its Constitution and combat terrorism, but we cannot do that on our own. We need the Council's support and assistance, and its understanding of the magnitude of the terrorist threat being faced in Syria, Iraq and the region. It is a threat that is beginning to reach the countries of Council members.

I hope sincerely that the Syrian crisis will be addressed without reference to the interventionist political agendas of some Governments, including some members of the Security Council. The agony of the Syrian people has grown far enough. Our misery is not up for sale; we are not a bazaar of immoral business, trafficking in the pain of our people. We do not want our people to leave our country; we want them to come back. The support for terrorism, economic sanctions, and Turkish, Jordanian and Qatari intervention must be stopped. The training of the so-called moderate terrorist opposition must be stopped. At that point the situation will be conducive to a political settlement, and the Syrian Government is open to discussion of it. It is open to coming to an understanding with the

national opposition in Syria, but not with terrorism. The members of the Council themselves refuse to have any dialogue with terrorists.

I repeat, for the last time, that our pain and agony and sorrow are vast, thanks to foreign intervention in our internal affairs and to misleading political interpretations of the situation in Syria. When there is a cover-up of actions by ISIS, the Al-Nusra Front, Jaish Al-Fatha, Jaish Al-Islam and all those terrorist gangs, that implies that their actions are legitimate and that there are countries protecting them, and as a result they persist with their terrorism. Meanwhile, what we need is concrete implementation of President Putin's initiative for establishing a genuinely effective international coalition against terrorism.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): I shall now give the floor to the Council member who wishes to make a statement.

Mr. Hmoud (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Jordan will respond in writing to the accusations made by the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic this morning.

The President (*spoke in Russian*): There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 11.35 a.m.